



Matakohē/Limestone Island Rangers Monthly Report – October 2007

- We have both just got back from our respective seminar/workshops; Cath from the kiwi egg candling course and Pete from the Sanctuaries of NZ workshop. Both were very interesting and relevant to our work on the island. The opportunity to catch up with other projects is also invaluable.

Kiwi

- Baldrick was caught for her annual transmitter change at the beginning of the month. She was in very good condition and probably coming up to lay. Her mate Glen is now incubating the new egg or eggs – the egg laid earlier was finally abandoned after an extended period of spasmodic night time visits.
- Sir Ed, the young male caught recently, also abandoned his egg. It was collected and taken to Auckland Zoo for artificial incubation; however it proved to be infertile. Infertile and abandoned eggs are not uncommon for a young pair in their first breeding season. The good news however, is that he is already sitting again and seems happy to stick with this egg – he has been on it now for over three weeks. We check him periodically in the middle of the night to make sure he is mobile and hasn't got his transmitter hooked up.
- We have also discovered that his mate appears to be Kahui Whetu, an island-bred bird who is also a permanent resident. She is close by him most days and they spent the day together at the current nest site just before he started sitting. If these two are a pair it is likely that Sir Ed will be allowed to stay on the island – lucky boy!
- Wilson, the bird named by **Golden Bay Cement** staff, has been released to the mainland. The release was timed for an afternoon during the school holidays and many of the staff and their children took the opportunity to come along and see 'their' kiwi set off into the big wide world. Thanks go to Todd Hamilton for facilitating the release.
- Cathy attended a kiwi egg candling course at Kiwi Encounter in Rotorua last week. To candle an egg, a light is shone through it to determine whether it is fertile and it's stage of development. While there it was very interesting to look around the Operation Nest Egg (ONE) facility at Kiwi Encounter. The facility is very professionally run and has an excellent record for successful hatch of kiwi eggs. Staff there are highly dedicated and enthusiastic and have contributed a lot to our knowledge of kiwi.
- It was also interesting to meet with people from other groups and learn how they do things. Once again there are many dedicated people out there. When eggs are collected for ONE, they are often taken at night when the male is off the nest to reduce the risk of damage to the egg. In many cases this involves sitting quietly in freezing conditions until the male decides to head out for a feed – sometimes at 1 or 2 in the morning!

Fauna

- With the help of Marleen Baling and Chris Wedding from Massey University, we have done the base line disease screening on the copper skinks on the island, in preparation for our proposed lizard translocation. We had a very successful lizard hunt. The pitfall traps were set the day before and on the day 3 teams searched by hand. 50 skinks were captured in less than two hours! This is a great result and shows that these little guys are doing well in the absence of predators. Each skink was placed in a marked container, sampled and then released back where it was found. We are still waiting on

the disease testing results. Special thanks to Marleen and Chris who came up from Auckland and gave us the benefit of their expertise on the day.



Marlene swabbing the lizards as part of the disease screening process – Chris, Pagey and Gerry observing!

- The Caspian Terns now have 25-30 eggs, though Pete did see 3 freshly predated eggs earlier in the month. It is likely that either a harrier hawk or the Black-back gulls are to blame. In general, however, all is well with the colony and there appear to be more birds present than last year - possibly they are benefiting from our buffer zone work.
- We have also had 3 fledgling Grey Warblers in the trees around the house. At first they were just tiny balls of fluff calling forlornly to the parents for food but in just a few days they are looking more like the adults apart from the continuing 'feed me' call. Sounds strangely familiar!

Sanctuaries of NZ Workshop

This is a very brief summary of some of the most topical papers.

- Review of a Giant Weta translocation to Karori Wildlife Sanctuary where 20 individuals had transmitters attached and monitored. Their preferred habitat was identified as a 5 year old planting site with long grass. Most common roost sites; in the long grass and under logs/debris.
- Review of 'Reproductive Technologies' essentially addressing genetic issues associated with small populations and management tools that could be used to increase diversity including; DNA testing to identify genetic pool; artificial insemination; improve and expand current genetic data bases.
- Paper on seabird translocation; gave an overview of seabirds and associated translocations that have taken place including Grey Faced Petrel on Limestone Island. Diving Petrels were used a case study to highlight some of the challenges of translocation – artificial diet, stress and thermal shock.
- Predator Best Practice overview; presenting information only available on the DoC internal web site.
- Monitoring lizards; a PhD student presented a paper on monitoring lizards using closed cell foam wrapped around trees to provide shelter. Initial findings look promising with good occupancy recorded by species including Forest, Common, Pacific and Green Gecko. This is good news for our post translocation monitoring because Forest and Green Gecko normally reside in the canopy and are notoriously difficult to monitor.
- Isabelle Castro from Massey University chaired a very interesting session on disease screening discussing the problems and issues around translocation – it's a case of watch this space at the moment.

- One of Isabelle's students also presented a paper; Saddleback translocation from Tiritiri Matangi to Bushy Park near Wanganui. The student had completed all the paper work for the project including the SOP and permits. However the 2 stage translocation 'experiment' she planned had to be abandoned when some of the first group tested positive for an unusual avian disease. All the birds were subsequently released 2 weeks late after the sick birds were treated at Massey University. This highlighted the need for caution when translocating species and the potential for problems to arise.

Predator Control

- A fairly routine month servicing traps and bait stations with no catches on the island.
- The buffer zone also continues to be relatively quiet with only 1 rat and a possum caught this month. If mustelid activity rises Pete will increase his rounds to weekly visits – currently fortnightly, to keep the traps as active as possible.
- The tracking tunnels were set at the end of September with **no rodent tracking recorded**. A card with an area of ink in the middle is placed in the tunnel over night with peanut butter used as an attractant. If a rodent passes through the tunnel it walks through the ink and leaves inky foot prints on the clean card at either end. The foot prints are readily identified and lizard foot prints are often seen.

General

- Thanks to last months Wednesday volunteers who braved squally showers while clearing the remaining vegetation away from the cement ruins. A job well done.
- The new tractor has arrived at the dealers in town and is currently having its wheels galvanised and the rest of the body work rust treated.
- FOMLI has decided to purchase a projector and screen to help with the increasing number of presentations we are making. The Power Point show certainly helps to showcase the island and make it much easier for us to give the presentations. This month Pete spoke to the University of the Third Age (U3A) with the presentation being very well received.

Up coming

- **Volunteer Wednesday November 7th**, pick up at 9am, back around 1.30pm after lunch. Pete is planning some weed work on the southern face. This will be a bit of a scramble, good shoes/boots required and secateurs will be useful. For the less mobile, several of the signs need touch-up painting.

Pete and Cathy



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